SELF-TRAINING IN PRAYER

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By

A. H. McNEILE, D. D.

Regius Professor of Divinity in the University of Dublin, Fellow of Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge; Author of "Concerning Christ", "Self-Training in Meditation", etc.

In the turmoil of our surface life there is a multitude of men and women who would give anything to be able to look through it and see God. Many of them pray, but seldom feel that they are doing something *real*. This book suggests the ways for the individual to make of prayer a reality, a first essential of a deepening Christianity.

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Regius Professor of Divinity in the University of Dublin.

This book goes straight to the heart of our religious needs. It is written for those men and women who wish to make of prayer a cornerstone of their religious experience. Dr. McNeile shows how a prayer can be made a part of daily life. He clearly presents the two chief phases of the problem of prayer as they arise in the Christian's mind: belief in the value and efficacy of prayer, and how to pray. He points out some of the mistaken ideas of prayer that lead to disappointment, and shows what true prayer should be—not a mere duty, but a religious experience filled with help and significance.

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"Despise not thy prayer, for He to whom thou prayest despiseth it not."

S. BERNARD.

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PREFACE

In the turmoil of our surface life there is a multitude of men and women who would give anything to be able to look through it and see God. Many of them pray, but seldom feel that they are doing something *real*. They cannot launch out into the deep, and let down their nets for a draught from the ocean of Reality. Prayer is to them a religious duty rather than a religious experience.

It is to such that these suggestions are offered. For the deepening consciousness of the Reality of prayer is one of the first essentials of a deepening Christianity. True prayer is not simply a means by which we can make ourselves "good enough to go to Heaven," but a means by which we can put ourselves and the world around us into touch with God. And therefore without it all schemes for the lifting up of mankind are schemes with God left out; which will fail in the long run as they have always failed. It is possible that some of those who read these chapters have

in the past been able to get into touch with Reality in their prayers, but that they are conscious of having lost ground again. Not that their prayers are fewer but that they are less alive. They have allowed themselves, that is, to get a little out of practice, and to be content with prayers that are less alive. If so, they might find it a help to read this little manual for self-training once more, and to use its suggestions, as they would use exercises in a book of music, as material for fresh and determined practice.

A. H. McNeile.

Dublin.

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SELF-TRAINING IN PRAYER

I. REALITY IN PRAYER

PRAYER may be looked at from different points of view, as either a problem, a phenomenon, or a profession. As a philosophical problem it involves other problems, such as those connected with the so-called "laws of Nature" and miracle, divine foreknowledge and determination, and man's will and power of voluntary action. As an historical phenomenon it is a fascinating study; it may be traced from the most primitive of savage incantations till it reaches its highest development in the life of Christian saints. As problem or as phenomenon alone, it is of purely academic interest; but whatever may be the best word to use as a counterpart to "academic," that word must be applied to prayer as a profession. It is a subject that is intensely alive to those who believe in it and practice it. And this book is written for no one else. There is only one object that I would ask you to set be-

fore you in reading these pages, and that is to study prayer in such a way as to gain a deeper and more vivid understanding of its aliveness. To study prayer is not simply to study a book about it, but to make the suggestions which the book contains, if they are of any value, a guide in a long, diligent course of self-training. A beginner should set himself to practice them, as he would work through the exercises in a grammar. In a sermon on the subject it would be natural for a preacher to try to rouse his audience to pray *more*. Probably none of us prays enough. But it is far more important to learn how to pray *better*. At best "we know not what we should pray for as we ought"; the Holy Spirit must do that for us "with unutterable groanings," because at present we know only in part, and pray as well as prophesy in part. But even in this partial power that we possess there are many different degrees. Some Christians are advanced experts, and others the most elementary beginners. It is a common experience, however, that the advanced expert is not always the most suitable person to teach the elements of a subject, and that is why I can venture to offer these suggestions.

We are all longing that the world may become a better world after the War, and number-

less ideas are afloat as to how to make it so. We know that many thousands of men and women are not Christians at all, and need to be converted. But I am sure—and I say it as deliberately and earnestly as I can—that the great and crying need is that those who are Christians should learn to pray better. So many do not think of it as the profession of their lives, for which they need training, practice, experience, just as truly as a doctor, or nurse, or school teacher. If Christianity is to spread, it must be spread by Christians, and the one and only effective means of doing so is not argument but holiness, which includes prayer.

Let us begin with our Lord's words in St. Matt. 6:7: "When ye pray, use not idle words" —our English translation, "use not vain repetitions," does not really represent the force of the Greek—"use not idle words as the heathen do, for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking." And do not some Christians think the same? or at any rate act as if they thought so? They use many books of devotion, they attend many services, they say many prayers; but all the time they know, at the bottom of their hearts, that a great deal of it is idle words. Carry your mind back to last Sunday, or the last time you were pres-

ent at a Church service, and ask yourself—How much of that service was, in my case, real prayer, and not merely listening, or possibly woolgathering, while prayers were being read? St. Augustine has a characteristic comment on our Lord's words. He says that our prayers ought to contain not *multa locutio,* but *multa precatio*—"not much speaking, but much prayer." Our great difficulty is not to say a great many prayers, but to make our prayers alive, and vivid, and real.

I once read an article in a Church paper entitled, "What's Wrong with the Laity?" I have very little doubt as to the answer. The mass of Christian people are losing their hold on religion, or perhaps I should say religion is losing its hold on them, because for some centuries past its *Reality* has been gradually fading from their lives. God is not real to them, nor Christ, nor the Holy Spirit; this world is real to them, but not the other. And prayer, instead of being the center and mainspring of their lives, has become a mere appendage, a nice little habit tacked on to them as children with their pinafores, and given up when they put away childish things. Nothing will make the world Christian till the world has learnt to pray. And in the same Church paper, soon after-

wards, some one retorted with the question: "What's Wrong with the Clergy?" And I believe the true answer is precisely the same. A terribly large percentage of the clergy needs to be converted. They are obliged, by their profession, to say many prayers; but the best men among them would confess that they very often use idle words, because their prayers are lacking in reality. The first step in our self-training is to recognize our need.

At this point the reader who wants to make full use of these pages is advised to kneel down and think slowly and quietly about himself, to find out how great his need really is. In his daily life—his work, recreation, walks, meals, conversations—how small a place is occupied by God! How seldom he remembers Him, or does the small daily actions for His sake, with the conscious wish to give Him pleasure because he loves Him!

II. NATURE

NOW dwell on the word Reality. Look at a rose in summer, arrayed as Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed, and try to think what it *really is*. Ask the botanist and the biologist to help you, and they will describe, probably with many Latin words, its genus and family, all its parts, its growth, and its habits. But that will not tell you what a rose really is. You call in a mathematician, and by means of geometry and trigonometry he might be able to tell you all about its curves and planes; its form and shape could, theoretically at any rate, be mapped out in diagrams. But that would not express the real rose in its sensuous and compelling loveliness. Or, once more, the chemist could tell you the part played by sun and rain, air and soil; he might explain the causes of color and scent. But the real rose would be as far off as ever. Something affects you which is deeper and more mysterious than all this, something intangible, invisible, but which appeals to you as infinitely

more real than anything which your senses can grasp. And we call it *Life*. Your eye passes to another rose, to a lily, to a hundred other revelations of beauty. And as you feast yourself upon them, you know that it is one and the same Life that makes them all what they are. You cut a shoot off the rosebush and plant it, and it makes roots for itself, and yields you another rose. It is the same Life, expressing itself by means of sun and air and soil, shape and color and scent.

Now yield yourself to that thought; deliver yourself up to the unspeakable Reality which is the source of your garden's beauty. And then let yourself wander on through all the vast tracts of the earth, and then through all the dizzy tracts of the universe; and try to feel that what is true of the rose must be true of all that is. Goethe expressed the truth in a sentence when he said, "Everything transitory is parable"; in other words, everything material is only a temporary outward and visible instrument by which Life—Reality—expresses itself.

I think it is probably true to say that the great majority of people have done very little indeed towards getting into touch with Reality in this way. They enjoy what meets their

senses, but they do not penetrate to its Source. Those who do it most successfully are the true artists, the painters and poets and musicians and all the people whom we call geniuses. But it is possible for every one to do it to some extent, if he sets to work to train his faculties to that end. An artist of any kind is born, not made; but many a born artist has remained undiscovered, even by himself, because his natural faculties have not been given a proper chance of doing their work. I am not, however, asking any one to try to become an artist, but to try to gain a little more of the wealth of interest and beauty that is added to life when he can feel, or perceive, or realize, the divine Reality behind and within everything in the universe.

This Life, or Reality, which is the only real thing in Nature, is sometimes described as "supernatural"; but the word is apt to be misleading, because to so many minds it suggests something unreal. We might coin the word "intranatural," "within the natural"; but we must get rid of all notion of space or locality. Music is not locally in a violin when it is expressed by means of a violin. And the divine Reality is not locally in Nature, but expresses itself by means of Nature.

But next let us ask—If it is there, why do

not we all realize it naturally? Well, suppose we could imagine a person born, and brought up, and living unceasingly, in a certain light, or with a certain sound always in his ears, or a certain scent always in his nostrils. It would be very difficult for him to realize the fact of such a light, or sound, or scent. He could do it only by a special concentration of thought upon it. Having been told that it existed, he would have to bring himself into such a condition that he could disregard everything else that met his senses, and strive with his whole being to realize that one thing which always surrounded him. He could do it gradually, if he went to work the right way. This thought of concentration is very important, and will come before us again.

To realize the divine Reality in Nature to ever so small an extent, to wonder at it, and enjoy it, and to be lifted out of ourselves by it, is what is called Natural Religion, or the Religion of Nature. And some of the artistic geniuses who do it well and easily are so engrossed and enraptured that they feel as though they were satisfied by it, and so they never get any further. They are so entirely enthralled by the cult of Beauty that they have no thought or conception of anything better. And if to

this Reality, which they reach by means of Nature, they give the name God, and find Him in no other way, they are what we call Pantheists. The truth contained in Pantheism is gloriously true so far as it goes; but by itself it is only a half truth, and therefore false. But since truth is in it, it ought not to be neglected by the Christian. In our self-training in prayer it is a real help to practice that inner concentration by which we can pass through Nature, which is seen and temporal and therefore symbolic and unreal, to that which is unseen and eternal and therefore the only Reality. That is the nearest approach to prayer that the Pantheist can make; and many of them do make it to a wonderful extent, which puts many Christians to shame. It is, in fact, an urgent call to us for self-scrutiny. It is worth while to pause here before passing to the next chapter, and to think whether, in this respect, you have not been shutting the eyes of your soul to Reality —reveling, perhaps, in the sense-enjoyment of Nature, but making very little effort to get, by means of it, into touch with the Divine. Recognize your need, and then begin at once to practice, and to train yourself at every opportunity to realize that every beautiful object in Nature is an instrument by which God is ex-

pressing Himself. We know it theoretically; sometimes we thank Him for it; but to very few is it real.

NOTE.—A correspondent writes, "What are we to say about ugly things?" I think that we may reply by adapting St. Paul's words in Rom. xiv. 14: "There is nothing ugly of itself; but to him that esteemeth any thing to be ugly, to him it is ugly." Ugliness is my description of the unpleasant effect produced upon *me* by the physical appearance of a thing. The effect is akin to pain. Heat, light, sound, taste, may each be pleasant to a certain degree of intensity, but if the intensity increases they become painful. And they may be pleasant for one person to a much greater degree of intensity than for another. It is impossible to say that they are instruments of God's Self-expression only as long as they are pleasant, and not when they become unpleasant. The problem of ugliness, as of pain, is as difficult for our limited intelligence as the problem of man's will, which can, and does, set itself in opposition to God's will. But it is not to be solved by a dualism which excludes from His all-reaching activity things which do not cause us physical sensations of pleasure.

III. PERSONS

WHEN we pass from the half truth in Pantheism to the whole truth in Christianity, our thoughts must move in the same direction, but on a higher plane. The Christian has learnt that the supreme, the only, Reality—that which expresses itself impersonally in Nature—is *personal*. We can speak of He, not of It. Personality has been defined as "the capacity for fellowship," that is the capacity for self-communication to persons, communion, mutual response, mutual indwelling, real union, with persons. So that I am able to say—God is in me; God is in you. But remember, all idea of locality must be avoided. It is not a little bit of God inside me, and a little bit of God inside you, any more than we can say that there is a little bit of music inside one violin and a little bit of music inside another violin. It is God, the one infinite Reality, who reveals Himself as physical life in all Nature, and as personal character in man. The twofold truth is stated in the Prologue of the Fourth Gospel:

"All things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made; in Him was Life." Thus far the evangelist describes Reality in Nature. But then comes the leap to the higher plane: "The Life was the Light of men." That is what makes all mankind one. As individuals, men are only instruments, symbols, "parables," to use Goethe's word, of the Infinite and the Eternal. But as personal, mankind is one communion and fellowship. And the more we can annul our individual Self, the freer we are to realize our oneness with the Whole. He that loseth his Self shall find it.

But the Whole, in its ideal and complete perfection, proceeding eternally from God, existing eternally as the Object of God's love and thought, and expressed in time in the Person of Jesus Christ, is the Second Person of the Holy Trinity. And dwelling in us, manifesting, expressing Himself by means of us, is His Spirit, the Third Person of the Holy Trinity. St. Paul had a clear grasp of the twofold truth. He describes the purpose for which God converted him in the words: "It pleased God . . . to reveal His Son in me" (Gal. 1:15); God did not convert Saul merely for his own sake, but that he might become an instrument by which

the divine personal Reality should express Himself. And exactly parallel with that is his description of the use which God makes of all Christians: "There are diversities of workings, but the same God who worketh all in all. But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the (general) advantage" (I Cor. 12:6, 7). The Holy Spirit manifests, expresses Himself in all Christians as instruments, or, as St. Paul puts it later in the chapter, in all the several members of the one Body of Christ.

IV. THE ESSENCE OF PRAYER

THE thought of divine Reality expressing Himself personally by means of persons carries us to the heart of our subject. What exactly is prayer? I hope that all that has been said so far will have helped to lead us to a definition. Prayer is not petition, or intercession, or praise, or thanksgiving, or meditation, or contemplation. These are, so to speak, the bookwork of the subject; they are the grammar and vocabulary of the celestial language. And self-training requires that they shall be worked at with steady, plodding, perseverance, in order that we may arrive at its very spirit and meaning. They are methods, which we shall study later; roads by which we can travel towards our goal. But the goal itself, the inner essence of prayer is one and the same. It is *by a deliberate act of our whole being to make real to ourselves the divine Reality.* That which is divinely personal in us reaches after the personal God who wants to reveal Himself through us. It is the act of

realizing Christ in us and in all men, of arriving at a consciousness of His Spirit in us and in all men. A Christian at prayer is like a living violin striving to realize, to immerse itself consciously in, the musician's soul of which it is an instrument. That which the artist does by the consideration of material nature, the Christian does, on a higher plane, by prayer. "The Life was the Light of men." Light is one of the greatest of Biblical metaphors for the divine, personal Reality revealing Himself in man, and found perfectly in Christ. And the aim of prayer is to gain a real inner perception of the Light.

But to how many Christians do words like these convey any vivid meaning? A sign of the extent to which many Christians fail in the matter of prayer is the meaning which they attach to the word "faith." We read: "Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed"; and St. Paul says: "We walk by faith, not by sight." Such sayings mean that we must not wait to accept spiritual truths until we are convinced of them by proofs supplied through our bodily senses, or arrived at intellectually by logical deduction. But many people are apt to make "faith" equivalent to what is called "blind faith," a nominal acceptance of

untried truths simply on the testimony of others—the testimony of the Bible, or of the experience of other Christians.

There is, indeed, another misuse of the word "faith," which has to do with answers to prayer. Some people make it mean a feeling of certainty that God will give something that He is asked for, which, if they could only contrive to feel it, would be an infallible magic in procuring whatever they happen to want. And when God does not give just what they happen to want, because it would not help forward His plans for them and for mankind, they conclude mournfully that the reason must have been their want of faith.

Both of these are caricatures of real faith. Faith is that which enables us to say: "We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen." The Queen of Sheba heard a report in her own land of Solomon's wealth and wisdom; and she was willing to accept the information as trustworthy. But when she came—that was the real act of faith—and saw it with her own eyes, she said, "Behold the half was not told me."

But what to those who find? Ah! this
Nor tongue nor pen can shew;

The love of Jesus, what it is
None but His loved ones know.

It is quite right to begin by taking the fact of Christ for granted on the report of others; but it is something unspeakably different when we reach actual personal experience. That is the crying need of to-day. The faith in Christ of so very many Christians is still nominal, and theoretical, and conventional. "The Incarnate, Crucified, and Risen Christ is the only Reality —our salvation and strength and glory and joy? Yes, oh yes, so I have been told; and I quite believe it. That is why I say my prayers and go to Church." But it isn't *real* to them. We want to be able to say, as the Samaritans said to the woman, "Now we believe, not because of thy speaking, for we have heard for ourselves." "Oh come hither and hearken, all ye that fear God, and I will tell you what He hath done for my soul!" That is the result of faith. Faith is the action of the whole being which drives a man to make experiment, to gain living experience, of the divine Reality; and prayer *is* the experiment and the experience.

V. PENITENCE AND HUMILITY

WE must next turn to a thought of quite immeasurable importance. If the divine Reality, which wants to express itself, is personal, and possesses character, it can be realized in actual experience only by persons possessed of character akin to it. In other words, that which destroys our power of experiencing Reality, and hinders us from reaching after union with it, is Sin. The pure in heart shall see God. Perfect sinlessness alone can be in complete oneness with infinite perfection. It is only by being united with Christ's sinlessness, by being "accepted in the Beloved," that we can begin to catch the faintest spiritual glimpse of the personal Reality. But to be accepted in the Beloved means to be forgiven by God. And therefore at every stage in our self-training no step in advance is conceivable without *Penitence*. We are always surrounded by the limitless ocean of God's love, but like the shellfish we can shut it out. When penitence opens the shell, the love of God immediately, "auto-

matically" floods our heart, and we are forgiven. But as long as we have one sin knowingly unrepented of, one sin from which we do not really want to be free, any approach to Reality is absolutely barred. Sin is the assertion of our individual Self, the separation of our individual Self from the infinite Person. Sin is the act of moving away from God; and since prayer is the act of moving into union with Him, sin and prayer are a contradiction in terms.

And from Penitence *Humility* is born. It sounds hard, but it must be said: You cannot pray, you cannot get into touch with divine Reality, except in proportion to your humility; your selflessness; your readiness, for example, to take a rebuke or a slight without resentment, to give a real meaning to St. Paul's words "in honour preferring one another," to esteem others better than yourself. You can pray only in proportion as you "have this mind in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who . . . emptied Himself . . . humbled Himself, becoming obedient even to (the climax of) death, yea the death of the Cross." "Becoming obedient." That is, to most of us, a matter of desperate difficulty: sheer humble obedience to God's will, in whatever form, or by whatever

means, it may make itself known to us, whether through the guidance of circumstances, or the call of conscience, or—what is often harder to accept—through other people.

And beside the difficulty of obedience there is the difficulty of readiness to be in the background, to be unnoticed, and passed over, to take trouble and to receive in return little or no praise or acknowledgment or thanks. Every one has felt the thousand pin pricks of life, which hurt so horribly while we are diseased with Self-love. They usurp our whole attention, they keep our thought and memory engrossed. While we are feeling resentment, pride, touchiness, temper, and such like, we cannot feel God. While we are in the grip of Self we cannot be free to fling out our arms in a yearning grasp of the Infinite and the Eternal.

So we begin to see why it is that the great masters of the spiritual life who have taught the world how to pray, one and all without exception, began and carried on their self-training with penitence, self-mortification, struggles against sin, humility, selflessness. Every branch in the True Vine that beareth fruit, even to the extent of the first newborn desire to feel after Him and find Him, the Father purgeth that it may bring forth more

fruit. And if He does it by sorrow, anxiety, or pain, it is for the same all-loving purpose. However far you advance, however close the union with God to which you attain, the purging must still go on, that you may bear more and more fruit, and learn obedience by the things that you suffer.

And is not that exactly the meaning of Baptism? Union with the Divine Life by means of a death unto sin. The struggle of the Christian towards God is simply the continuation, the making real and actual, of the New Birth in Baptism.

Before passing on to the next chapter I would ask you to undergo again a long quiet self-scrutiny, to determine, as fully and ruthlessly as you can, the ways—perhaps the many ways—in which Self asserts its claims in your life; the ways in which you find obedience and humility peculiarly difficult. And then offer a prayer of penitence.

The first part of our subject is now completed. I hope that the reader will not be surprised that up to this point practically nothing has been said about prayer as it is usually understood. Precisely what I am trying to do is to get away from the ordinary, conventional ideas about prayer, and to carry our minds to

the point of view of those who knew more about it by experience than most of us have attained to—people like St. Augustine, St. Bernard, St. Teresa, Brother Laurence, and many others; and behind them the apostles and prophets on whom the Church is built; and behind them Jesus Christ Himself the head Corner Stone. All these knew by vivid, compelling, personal experience that prayer is not a mere telephoning to God to ask Him to do things, but a developing life, an expanding, deepening, heightening, intensifying, of the whole being, by allowing it to be drawn in the embrace of God nearer and nearer to Himself.

VI. INFLUENCE

THE second part of our subject will still not be prayer as ordinarily understood. Nevertheless it brings before us an aspect of our self-training whose importance cannot be exaggerated. In Chapter III it was said that because the divine Reality makes mankind the instrument of His personal Self-expression, the medium through which He reveals Himself—in other words, because "the Life was the Light of men"—*all mankind is one*. If you tell some people that, they will shrug their shoulders and say, "No doubt there is a sense in which it is theoretically true; but practically it is nonsense; mankind is many and not one." To speak of the solidarity of man is a playing with words, a fanciful absurdity, to those whose thoughts are bound to the transitory, material, surface things of life. But for self-training in prayer it is all-important to try to gain a vivid grasp of it as a real truth. The tendency of the modern Western mind is towards Individualism, but it is a tendency which leads away from

prayer. That is one of the reasons why true prayer—the real thing—has been fading away from so many lives.

When we approach the conception of the oneness of mankind, we must try to lift it out of vagueness, and to change it from an abstraction or a poetical figure of speech into a clear-cut and appealing fact. And I think that the best way to do that is to study what we call *Influence*. It will show us what we want to see in—one might almost say—an outward and visible form. Consider the word itself. Whoever was responsible for coining it went a long way towards explaining the idea. "Influence" is derived from the same word as "Influx," a "pouring or flowing in." Any word involving the thought of motion in space, if it is employed to describe that which is nonmaterial, must be recognized as metaphorical. But this is, at least, an extremely good metaphor. Influence is the pouring in of personality into personality; it is the interpenetration of souls. An officer is in a trench with his men, and the order comes to make a charge. He leads the way with the courage of a true man, shouts a rousing word of encouragement, and pours courage into the whole of his company. But think what that means. Courage is not an unreal abstraction,

but, on the other hand, it is not a thing in itself with an existence separate from the officer. It is *his* courage which he pours into them, an ingredient of the person flowing into other persons. May we not say that Influence, looked at in this way, becomes a clear-cut and appealing fact? Courage does not *leave* the officer. On the contrary his courage grows, because in rousing his men to courage, he in turn receives theirs poured into him. It is a mutual influx of personalities. But I think we may go further, and say that all the soldiers who fought bravely in Europe and Asia and Africa, whether of the allies or of the enemy, were severally items in one complex system of Influence. The mutual give-and-take of courage extended over three continents. And more than that, it extended to thousands who were not fighting; the courage of the wounded, the courage of those who were maimed for life, the courage of prisoners of war, and the courage of multitudes of men and women who were bravely bearing sorrow, anxiety, and strain. It was one communion and fellowship of courageous souls, every one of whom was poured into all the others.

But that was only one minute specimen of Influence. When one person receives it from

another, whether in the form of courage or of any other ingredient of the soul, it can flow on from him into others without diminishing in the process, and with no limits of possibility. All mankind, past and present, form one communion and fellowship, one inconceivably complex system of interpenetration. If you think it out, it is a frightening thought—the immeasurable responsibility of every soul in its effects upon the whole of mankind. It is parallel with what we are told is the case in the physical universe. In a paper entitled "The Modern Conception of the Universe," * Dr. G. F. C. Searle writes: "The effects of a single act of free-will extend through the whole of space, and will last as long as the present order continues. Thus the voluntary motion of a man's hand not only affects the motion of the earth by a calculable amount, but also the motions of the sun and of the remotest stars, and the motions of all these bodies will differ for the rest of time from the motions they would have had if the man had not moved his hand."

And if it is a frightening thought, it is also extraordinarily humbling when it is once clearly grasped. The words I and Me begin to be a

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* *Pan-Anglican Papers,* S.P.C.K., 1908.

little less clear-cut and obtrusive. We begin to see that it is not only proud but also very silly to lay so much stress on our individual Self, when we realize that the soul of each of us is conditioned, to so enormous an extent, by the interplay of all souls.

Influence, then, is an almost visible exhibition of the oneness of mankind. If you dwell on it, and allow yourself quietly to be steeped in the notion of the interpenetration of personalities, you can almost come to see it. On certain occasions, with certain groups or bodies of people collected together, it is peculiarly vivid. Sometimes when you and another person are alone together, you can affect each other intensely; something seems to pass and repass between you so real that you feel as though you can, so to speak, cut it with a knife. But apart from these special instances, it is possible to gain a real grasp of the truth as a whole. And we must remember that it is not only the Influence of which we are conscious that counts, but also that far greater mass of which we are unconscious, that is poured out by, and stored up in, what is popularly called our subconsciousness, and shows itself perhaps long afterwards in word or deed or thought or habit. It all goes to shape character.

This wonderful system of mutuality between souls is an instance of something which it is very hard to grasp because we always live in it. But the reader is strongly advised, if he wishes to excel in prayer, to make a frequent and diligent practice of concentrating himself upon it, until it emerges and takes shape as one of the most compelling objects of his thought.

VII. CHARACTER

LET us go further, and see what follows from this. If all souls interpenetrate, mankind is not merely a jumble of different characters, like a boxful of differently colored marbles. Mankind, as one real whole, possesses one real character, the net result, at any given moment, of the whole process of its spiritual life. Every thought, word, and deed of every individual either lifts up or drags down, either improves or spoils, the net character of the whole, because every thought, word, and deed affects his own character, and therefore his influence. If one member suffer—spiritually—all the members suffer with it.

To grasp this truly and thoroughly is to arrive at a motive for holiness, and therefore a motive for prayer, which is free from all taint of Self. "For their sake I sanctify myself"—in order to lift up the net character of mankind. But when we speak of lifting up, or dragging down, the character of mankind, we mean drawing it nearer to, or further from,

the Character of God. That is the character that He wants to reveal and express in mankind as His instrument. It is the character of mankind as He thinks and plans it, and works and longs for it. In other words, it is the Character of the Incarnate, Crucified, and Risen Christ, Eternal, Human, Universal, the perfect expression of God, offering His life and power and perfection to every soul who wants to lift up the character of men.

VIII. PRIESTHOOD

ALL that has been said in the foregoing pages leads to the thought of Priesthood, which is quite fundamental in Christianity, and without which prayer is well-nigh emptied of all meaning.

An ambassador at a foreign court communicates the will of his government. In that act his individual self is by the nature of the case blotted out and nonexistent. His nation as a single whole expresses itself by means of him; he is a point at which the whole of one nation can come into contact with the whole of another nation.

And every human being is similarly representative of the whole of mankind. But to grasp the oneness of mankind, and the oneness of its character, and our representative relation to it, to concentrate ourselves upon it, to ponder it, and at last to feel it, is to feel the shame of the sin of the world—not only the shame of *my* sin, because it spoils *my* character, but the shame of all men's sin, because it wrongs the

Father of love, who wants to express Himself perfectly in man. The closer that we approach to union with Reality, the more we shall, as a medieval writer puts it, "feel sin as a lump"—feel all sin as one vast mass of crushing defilement which keeps mankind from rising to the divine ideal. Self-training in prayer, for any one who wants to become an expert, involves long and earnest practice in this realization of the oneness of human sin as of the oneness of human character. To feel all sin as my own, to feel myself a point at which human sin reveals itself, is at the opposite pole to the self-congratulation which says "I thank Thee that I am not as other men are." As far as the East is from the West so far is true "sympathy" removed from pious horror. But equally far is it removed from "apathy," and from the weak amiability which condones sin as a foible or a misfortune. To "feel sin as a lump" is to feel it intensely as your own; and the more you can do so, the nearer you will reach to the infinite sympathy of the Lamb of God, the sinless Penitent, who "taketh away the sin of the world" by making it His own, and destroying it by His life of obedience culminating on the Cross. That is what St. Paul meant when he said that "God made Him who

knew no sin to be sin on our behalf" (II Cor. 5:21). Any crude notion of mere substitution is far removed from this wonderful aspect of the Atonement.

And what is true of all sin is true of all sorrow. Here we use the word "sympathy" with the meaning that is more commonly attached to it. "Surely He hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows." In His measureless love He not only knew, but *felt* Himself to be the Representative of mankind, and therefore felt the world's agony as His own. And every human being is necessarily a representative of mankind; but we seldom get beyond the point of knowing it theoretically. To make it real, and feel it, requires a lifelong progress in love. And love grows by prayer, which brings us gradually to the realization of the oneness of the life of men. As we keep these things and ponder them in our hearts we learn that self-training in prayer involves following our Lord to Calvary, and hanging with Him upon His Cross.

But this is what we mean by a "priest." A priest is one who "being taken from among men is appointed for men in things pertaining to God" (Heb. 5:1). And from among the whole body of mankind a particular group of

people has been divinely appointed to be "a kingdom of priests," that is the Christian Church, which in turn chooses and appoints its representatives whom we call priests. The Church is the priest of mankind. And every Christian—man, woman, and child—ought to be taught that his whole and sole function, in things pertaining to God, is to exercise the priestly office. Every Christian, in so far as he is truly Christian, is a point at which mankind comes into union with God. Through Christians the Self-expression of the personal God is deepened and intensified as the ages go by, because the Church is in living and progressive union with the perfect expression of God, Jesus Christ the Priest.

Self-training in prayer, therefore, requires us to ponder on our priesthood, and on the "sympathy" which it involves, and to give it a living place in our understanding and life.

IX. PRAYER AND WORK

IN the first five chapters our thoughts dwelt mainly upon God as the one infinite personal Reality. In the next three we considered mankind as the instrument of His Self-expression. All this has shown us that prayer is a very big thing, a lifelong profession needing the most patient and strenuous self-training. The way is now clear to think of prayer as ordinarily understood, that is the various methods of prayer. But as a preliminary the relation between prayer and work calls for attention.

Every one is busy, or nearly every one. And some people are tempted to think: "Prayer? Oh yes, very important of course; but just now I absolutely haven't the time!" And they are inclined to add, "After all, when one is working for others it is a relief to think that *laborare est orare,* to work is to pray." Now when a person thinks that he is too busy to pray, he feels it annoying to be referred to the story of Martha and Mary, and cannot help sympathiz-

ing very much with Martha. But I am sure that that story is constantly misused. Are we really to suppose that Mary spent the whole of her life sitting still and doing nothing but contemplate, or read her Bible, while Martha spent the whole of her life in housework? Her grumble against Mary, "Lord, carest Thou not that my sister hath left me to serve alone?" shows that she was not accustomed to be left to serve alone, and that Mary usually helped her. Martha and Mary must not be taken as types of two people, the one all work and the other all prayer. They are a photograph, a snapshot, so to speak, of two states of mind at a particular moment—the moment when the chance offered itself of a quiet, satisfying conversation with our Lord. Mary seized it and Martha did not. They represent, in fact, two different attitudes towards the divine Reality. A few people have received a vocation to spend their lives in prayer, and nothing but prayer. But the majority, whose vocation is to what is called an active life of work, can themselves be likened to either Martha or Mary according as their work is lacking in prayer or filled with prayer. The question is, What is the meaning of work filled with prayer? Now I cannot speak smooth things; I must put before you

the highest Christian ideal. It means work done in such a condition of soul that in every detail, in every hour and moment and second, you are filled with the Presence of God, you are in touch with the divine Reality. To make quite true in your life the saying that "to work is to pray," is to be Martha and Mary at the same time; and that is the climax of Christian perfection. It gives a new meaning to the Gospels to read the accounts of our Lord's busy life, remembering that that was literally true of Him; never for an instant was He out of touch with God. But how did He do it? Even He did not spend His whole life in work. Because He was human, because He was tempted like as we are, and hemmed in by physical limitations as we are, He spent long, long hours of silent solitude and prayer, keeping Himself in unvarying union with the divine Reality. And if He needed it, how can we dare to spend a busy day without it? We must follow Mary every day, if we are to do Martha's work without the Lord's rebuke. If in all the busy racket of work we are to dwell under the defense of the Most High, and abide under the shadow of the Almighty, we must retain that defense, and hide ourselves under that shadow, by *making time* for deep, quiet prayer. It is the stern

practice in private that makes the world-famed professional. And if it is our profession to "follow the example of our Saviour Christ and to be made like unto Him," in other words, to be priests always in touch with God on behalf of mankind, an absolute necessity in our self-training is practice in private.

X. METHODS OF PRAYER

IT is this practice of prayer in its various methods that we are now to study. Different writers have classified prayer in different ways. But perhaps the most helpful classification is one which may be connected with our Lord's words, "Ask and it shall be given you, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you." We may call the three classes Prayer of Utterance, Prayer of Thought, and Prayer of Union.

Prayer of Utterance comprises all prayer that takes the form of words, whether actually vocal and audible, or uttered internally in the mind. This includes petitions for oneself, intercession for others, and praise and thanksgiving to God. And I think that for large numbers of Christians who have not made much effort at self-training this virtually exhausts the whole of prayer. And even in this class, the practice of one or two or all three of them divides Christians into three grades. The least trained do not rise beyond petitions for

their personal needs, and that mostly when the needs are sudden and pressing. That is the sort of prayer that a good many people use instinctively. That their prayers are often intensely earnest, and that God hears them, no Christian would think of doubting. But if their prayers do not advance beyond that, the natural eagerness with which they ask for the supply of immediate personal needs will not carry them far in their spiritual progress. But any one who can add to his prayer intercession for others, has taken a great step forward. And the intercessions increase in width and range with the Christian's spiritual growth. But, thirdly, to add praise and thanksgiving to God with any reality of meaning marks a much further advance.

XI. EARNESTNESS

NOW, what is it that makes prayer effectual? Or, in other words, what sort of prayer accomplishes most?

It is easy to give a wrong answer to the question, and to think that effectiveness in prayer depends simply on the earnestness with which we pray. But take an instance. A mother is in an agony of mind because her little child falls dangerously ill, and she prays for his recovery with an earnestness equal to her agony of mind. And she may be inclined to feel, "Surely, surely, God cannot refuse me what I long for so intensely!" Just down the street there is a workhouse, where a little child is dangerously ill in the infirmary. His parents are dead, and no one in the world is fond enough of him to pour out passionate, agonized petitions for him. Do you suppose that God is going to restore the first child to health, but let the second die because any prayers that may have been offered for him were not earnest enough? When it comes to earnestness, petitions for ourselves and intercessions for others

are sometimes hardly distinguishable. It is natural and human to feel a desire most acutely when it is for something which bears upon oneself. And this is, for the most part, true even in the matter of praise and thanksgiving to God. We are generally moved to thank Him most warmly for blessings which affect us individually. If the former of the two children recovers, we can picture the eager joy with which the mother will pour out her thanks, whereas no one, perhaps, will feel the same joy over the motherless waif. We do not, of course, find fault with the earnestness of personal desire; but we must not think of it as capable *in itself* of persuading God to give us what He might not have given us otherwise.

Further, if earnestness of personal desire is the one thing needful, what are we to think of the effects produced by our public worship? I am very far from saying that our prayers, private and public, are not in need of more earnestness; but it must be an earnestness of the right kind; one that is not excited by the faintest touch of Self. In our training and practice in prayer few things are harder, and few things are more important, than this escape from Self. Our earnestness must be the earnestness not of individuals but of priests.

XII. THE TRUE MOTIVE

AND so we go back to the subject of Chapters VI-VIII, mankind, as one real whole, growing up towards the perfect Man. The nearer we can get to a passionate earnestness for that, the more will our prayer accomplish. Look at St. Paul. He wrote to the Colossians (2:1): "I want you to know how great a conflict I have [that is, with what agony of earnestness I pray] for you, and them at Laodicea, and as many as have not seen my face in the flesh." He had not founded either of those Churches, and his earnestness, therefore, was not caused by the fact that he was praying for personal friends, but was due to his burning desire for the building up of the whole Body of Christ, through which all mankind could be lifted into union with God. Think of your prayers for foreign missions, and for the Church's work at home, your prayers for the clergy, soldiers, sailors, doctors, nurses, chaplains, at home and abroad. Test your state of advance with regard to self-

training in prayer. Is the lifting up of mankind as one whole into union with God a motive real and pressing enough to give you a deep earnestness in these intercessions? And your prayers for your nation. What is their motive? They may spring from various degrees of selfishness. But the only sort of prayer that will accomplish anything is that the success of your nation, and the nature of its successes, and its consequences, may serve the purposes of God's kingdom—the lifting up of all mankind into union with Him.

And your prayers for the departed. It ought not to have needed the War to bring back this practice into wider use. If mankind is one, it is not only the little group of human lives at present on the planet in flesh and blood, but all souls past and present, who must be lifted up into union with God. Our prayers for them and theirs for us are alike intercessions for mankind as one whole.

Further, if this and nothing less than this is really our longing desire, we shall free ourselves from what is for some earnest Christians a great difficulty and snare. We shall be able to avoid the distracted feeling that, owing to the multitude of things and persons that need our prayers, we cannot, so to speak, cover the

ground. It is right, of course, to offer particular intercessions on matters which come under our individual notice, and are commended to our sympathy, provided we place them in their true relation to the whole. But we must not let ourselves wander into discursiveness, which too often means perfunctoriness; we must throw off the burden of mere multiplicity. That is a form of the "much speaking" in prayer which our Lord condemns. Our intercessions are not valuable in proportion to the number of things that we pray about.

XIII. PUBLIC WORSHIP

THAT is where public worship ought to be a help rather than a difficulty. In public worship we join, as members of the Church, in a corporate act, "to make prayers and supplications and to give thanks for all men" as our Prayer Book puts it. Try hard to make more real the conception of the Church as the priest of humanity; try hard to feel that the Church is not a collection of pious individuals, but a single organism working for the spiritual advance of the whole body of mankind; and Church services, even the sober intellectual restraint of Morning and Evening Prayer and the Litany, will become a new thing to you.

Above all, the Holy Communion must be freed from every vestige of Self. It is in its essence a corporate act in behalf of all men, one aspect of which is intercession. Whatever your particular shade of views about the doctrine of the Holy Sacrament, to leave it out of your life, or to throw it in occasionally as an extra, is to neglect the most non-selfish act of

intercession that you can make. Throughout the length and breadth of our religion the spiritual and the sacramental are complementary to each other. The Christian, therefore, who practices intercession without sacramental intercession cannot, from the nature of the case, reach the fullest success in his self-training.

Again, if any advance in prayer must begin, for each of us, with penitence and self-mortification, the same is true of corporate prayer. It ought to be the result of true sympathy, the feeling of the shame of the world's sin, of which we thought in Chapter VIII. The avoidance of a corporate act of penitence by English Christians during the War, lest the enemy should think we were downhearted, or doubted the rightness of our national cause, was a mournful exhibition of ignorance as to the nature of prayer.

Probably most Christians would admit that one of their greatest needs in the spiritual life is the self-training which will enable them to make public worship what it is intended to be. We must immerse ourselves, gradually, by practice, in the reality of the corporate life of the Church acting for mankind as one Whole in things pertaining to God. In Chapter II we

thought of the concentration by which it is possible to gaze with the eye of the soul through Nature to the divine Reality. And the same is true with regard to mankind. It would be a great help in practice if some members of a congregation would agree beforehand to come to an ordinary Church service with the united intention of concentrating themselves upon mankind as a whole, striving to make every petition bear upon that. They would find our Lord's words come home to them with wonderful force: "If two of you shall agree upon earth concerning any matter that they shall ask, it shall be done for them by My Father which is in heaven." The concentration of two is more than double the concentration of one; they can help each other to reach out to the divine Reality.

But this is a matter which needs long and patient practice. If the reader to whom this point of view is new will study his Prayer Book, as though for the first time, in such a way as to learn to make "We," "Us," and "Our" refer in every case not to the individual worshipers gathered at the moment in Church, much less to himself alone, but to mankind of which we are members, and to make every petition in which the personal pronoun does not

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occur definitely contribute to the working out of God's plan of lifting up the whole of mankind, he will realize how large and noble an element of public worship has hitherto been lost to him.

XIV. THY WILL BE DONE

THE same motive will safeguard our private petitions for ourselves. They will not be individual but personal, that is, they will be petitions that something may be granted to us which will somehow, in the manifold wisdom of God, advance the one personal life of mankind. That is really the meaning of saying "Grant me this if it is Thy will," and also "Grant me this for Jesus Christ's sake." God's will is always that "all men should be saved," all men as one whole should grow towards the perfect Man; and nothing which will not contribute to that will receive the endorsement of the perfect Man, and be included in the intercessions which, with unutterable groanings, the Holy Spirit offers for and in us; and hence nothing which will not contribute to that will be granted to us as an answer to prayer. This motive will give us perfect peace and submission in the numberless cases in which we do not get just what we ask for. "Ask and it shall be given you," means ask with God's will for

mankind in view, and ye shall receive, not necessarily your exact request, but that which you really want far more—something that will help to work out His will.

But it is impossible that that motive can really move us unless we are in close contact with Him—not holding the right views about Him, not a general benevolence which can extend itself widely over mankind, but real, inner, living contact with Him; in other words, real, inner, living love for Him, a love which wants nothing but that His will may be done, and wants that with all the strength of our being, and a love which is always ready to praise and thank Him for every exhibition of His will, whether it sends to us what we commonly call blessings, or whether, for His own loving purposes, it places us, and all the nations of the earth, with Him on the Cross.

XV. PRAYER OF THOUGHT

"ASK and it shall be given you, seek and ye shall find." The first has suggested Prayer of Utterance, or verbal prayer. The second suggests what I have called Prayer of Thought.

The search for truth has been the occupation of all thinking people in all countries at all times. In every branch of learning students profess, as the object of their lives, to be seekers after truth; some call themselves seekers after God. But in every branch of learning, intellectual search will teach men only facts about God and His actions, it will not find God Himself. We saw how true this is in thinking about a rose. Biologist, botanist, mathematician, chemist, or all combined, cannot make you know what a rose really is. And if this is the case with the divine Reality in Nature it is not less so with the divine personal Reality in man. To reach that, requires our will and our emotions more than our intellect; it requires something which is of the

nature of spiritual thought rather than of study. And this is afforded by what is usually called Meditation, in which the intellectual faculty is not excluded but takes the lowest place.

Large numbers of Christians think of meditation as an elaborate and artificial exercise of pious ingenuity for which a few religiously minded people seem to have time and inclination, but which for most people is quite out of the question. I will not pretend that it is easy. The easy things are not always the most worth doing. But whatever else may be said about it, "elaborate" and "artificial" are the last epithets that it deserves. Utter simplicity is the first mark of true meditation. The reason why it is not easy is that, being a method of reaching after contact with God, it requires all the preliminary conditions of penitence and humility. It requires a real longing to find the very God Himself, and it requires considerable determination, especially for beginners.

An illustration may help to show what it means. Some people, when they travel, fly from place to place, seeing the famous sights as fast as trains and motors will carry them. They want to have seen as many things as possible. But this continual hustling allows of

no real, intimate, inner knowledge of any one thing or place. That is like a person who reads through some prayers, or a passage in the Bible, and feels that he has done his duty to God for the day. But has he? Has he found God? Has he gained afresh any real, intimate, inner knowledge of Him? To do that, he must constantly pause over a verse, a phrase, even a word, and gaze right into its meaning, and get something out of it for his soul. He must go so slowly that it becomes a means of seeking after Reality, and finding in scene after scene, or sentence after sentence, a message from God which he, in turn, can translate into fervent prayer for himself and for others, into an earnest longing, or a hope, or a resolve, or a cry of penitence. It does not need elaborate study, or cleverness; it does not need any careful arrangement of your thoughts such as you would want if you had to preach a sermon or give a lesson; indeed it is a misuse of meditation to make it a means of preparing a sermon or a lesson. But it needs an eager desire to use the words, through which you are very slowly wandering, as a medium by which to get yourself into closer contact with God. It does not matter what you do with the passage; your treatment of it is known only to God and your-

self. It does not matter whether you can exercise much brilliant imagination or none at all. The only thing you have to do is to make the passage, or sentence, or word, by any means you like, and by as many means as you can contrive, helpful to your spiritual life, that is to your will and your love, your determination and your longing to reach after God. You need not expect to gain much pleasure from it at first; possibly you may never gain much pleasure from it. The facility in meditation of the spontaneous kind that makes it a daily delight to some people is not given to every one. But the patient continuance in effort is itself a discipline of incalculable value. And even to those who find the effort very hard indeed there comes from time to time a flash of spiritual insight which lights up a sentence, and makes the way easier. For the purpose of meditation the New Testament, since it deals directly with Jesus Christ, especially a Gospel, is more likely to be helpful than anything else, because He is the perfect revelation of God, and therefore it is easier to reach God by pondering on Him than on any other thing or person.

It is possible also to make use sometimes of a devotional book and not the Bible. But it is generally the best plan not to depend upon

other people's meditations, but to undergo the effort of making your own, however imperfectly.

All the great saints in the Church's history, and all the holiest men and women alive to-day, have made use of meditation as an absolutely indispensable part of their self-training. And no Christian who really wants to train himself in prayer can do without it.

Some people find it wise not to make a rule to give to it a fixed time every day, because in a busy life there are days when this is almost impossible; but make a rule, and often ask for the strength of God to help you to keep it, to spend on meditation a fixed time every week, so that you are free to vary the daily time when needful.

Modern Biblical study, which is now so widely spread, however useful in itself, tends to place a difficulty in the way. People are apt to get the notion that Bible reading always involves a study of the Synoptic problem, or Jewish eschatology, or the geography of Asia Minor, or something else up-to-date and academic. Devotional Bible reading, let me repeat, involves literally nothing but a longing determination to get, through penitence, humility, and quiet thought, into closer touch with God.

XVI. PRAYER OF UNION

WE turn now to the third clause in our Lord's sentence: "Knock and it shall be opened unto you," which suggests what I have called Prayer of Union. Meditation requires the intellectual faculty not to be excluded but to be kept rather in the background as compared with the free play given to the will and the emotions in their reaching after God. But Prayer of Union, or contemplation, is a further stage in which the intellectual faculty is not allowed to assert itself at all. "Commune with your own heart and in your chamber, and be still." That exhortation is not fully met either by petitions or meditations. There is something else, which it is exceedingly difficult to explain in words, and which can really be learnt by nothing but practice and experience, built upon the basis of true penitence and humility. If I were to ask a musician to explain what method I must adopt to gain a deep inner understanding of the meaning and glory of a symphony of Beethoven, he would not find it easy. But obviously he would begin his explanation

by telling me that first of all I must *listen in silence*. And yet though that is obvious in the case of music, it is not at all obvious to many Christians in the case of spiritual contact with God.

This subject has often been written about. It is the burden of a large number of medieval books on the spiritual life. It has been called Quietism, and other bad names. It is an important element in the religious practice of the Society of Friends. And it has recently been revived within the Church. But there is still room, perhaps, for a restatement of it, if only to guard against mistakes. For there are some bad mistakes into which it is easy to fall.

It may be well to suggest a definition as a basis for study. Prayer of Union, or of silence, or of contemplation—it has many names; some writers have called it "interior prayer"—is an attitude towards God in which intellectual thought and emotional feeling are kept in abeyance, the will is exercised in keeping them so, and the love of the whole being is free to unite itself with the love of God. The last may be expressed metaphorically by saying that love silently and persistently knocks at the door, that it may be opened for God's love to stream out.

XVII. MISTAKES

AND first, what to avoid. Three mistakes are often made, especially by beginners, in attempting the practice of contemplation.

1. We saw that in meditation all artificiality must be avoided. And the same is even more urgently necessary here, for artificiality is so closely akin to self-consciousness; and nothing is more fatal to the free play of humble and penitent love. When a person first begins this kind of self-training, he is at once troubled with the feeling—"I am now doing something really advanced in the Christian life, something novel and exciting, something that most Christians do not even attempt." But the moment the attempt becomes a pious pose, its value is instantly blotted out, and the door between the soul and the divine Reality is locked and double-locked by man himself, with no possibility of opening. Instead of doing something really advanced and novel, he is away back in the very old and very elementary condition of self-love, pride, and foolishness, the condition, in fact, of the Pharisee in the temple.

2. But some who free themselves, by God's help, from self-love and pride, do not quite escape the foolishness. They fall into a mistake arising from their very anxiety to gain the blessing that they seek. They imagine that the results of contemplation must take a striking or unusual form, a wonder, a thrill, a sweetness; and in their eagerness they strain after it with a mental, and even physical, tension. Some even adopt physical means to carry themselves away from their surroundings; they gaze at a crucifix, or an altar, or its lights, or a stained widow, or a picture. Of course any of these may suggest material for helpful meditation. But if they are used as a means of inducing a process which is difficult to distinguish from hypnotic self-suggestion, they have no more right to be considered as a legitimate method of Christian contemplation than crystal gazing. I think it should be clear that this is artificiality appearing in another guise, and one which may do great injury to a nervous, highly strung temperament. It is just such a temperament which lends itself most readily to the mistake. One of the commonest objections to religion is that it is merely a matter of temperament; and mistaken enthusiasm of this kind, which is as strictly artificial

as alcoholic excitement, gives a serious handle to the charge. As St. Theresa said, "From silly devotions God deliver us!" And in the same spirit of common sense Ruysbroek advises learners to adopt for contemplation any physical posture that will best make for quiet of mind and body, that neither mind nor body may intrude itself and interrupt the interior communing. He recognizes that some people can contemplate best when walking about, or standing, or kneeling; but he himself found it easier, and therefore simpler and more helpful, to sit. Anything will do, provided that it helps to reduce the physical element in contemplation to a minimum.

3. A third mistake, closely allied to the last, is to expect, or even to want or hope for, visions, trances, ecstasies or the like. These were related of many of the medieval saints, as also of Christians in earlier days; and they are by no means unknown in modern times. But those who have written about contemplation, and recorded their experiences, are unanimous in declaring that such experiences are never to be sought for, and cannot be gained by trying. I will not attempt to discuss the psychology of them. That branch of study is still far too young to afford safe ground for any definite

decision as to how far they are pathological, the results of temperament or of something in the nature of self-suggestion, and whether, or to what extent, they are an immediate divine gift. I want only to make clear that in either case they lie entirely outside the limits of our self-training.

XVIII. THE GIVE-AND-TAKE OF LOVE

IF we are right, then, in assuming that these three things—self-satisfaction, self-excitement, and the seeking for abnormal experiences—are bad mistakes to be resolutely avoided, what can be said as to the true nature of contemplation or Prayer of Union? It has two aspects, which are strictly and literally mutual, and inconceivable each without the other.

1. Recall what was said in Chapter VI about Influence, the influx, the flowing in, of personality into personality, the interpenetration of souls. Now, when some one exercises a strong influence over me, I may recognize the fact if I think about it, I may realize that when I speak or act or think in a particular way it is because he has influenced me. Again, I may, by a conscious act of will, put myself, or allow myself to be drawn, under his influence. And once more, I may experience a feeling of pleasure in doing so. But what is it in me which has actually received his influence? It is not my thinking consciousness, nor my

will, nor my feelings, but my whole Self, my Ego, to its deepest depths and its fullest content, not differentiated into its several aspects. This need not be described as my subconsciousness, or subliminal or supraliminal consciousness, because we do not know enough about it to give it any such spatial name. It is better to call it simply my Ego, or my spirit.

And the reception of God's influence, or in other words the influx of His Spirit, is analogous to this reception of human influence. One of the two aspects of contemplation is that in silence, with no striving of thought or will or feeling for the purpose of obtaining an effect, but with a concentration of the whole being, *not on a purpose but on a Person,* you receive His Spirit into your spirit; your spirit lies open and susceptible to the influence of His Spirit. When you afterwards think about it, you know that it has been so by its effects upon you; you can then feel and enjoy the tremendous fact of His Presence growing, deepening, brightening—how can language describe it?—as the years go by. And you find also that when you turn to the other methods of prayer that we have thought of, petition, intercession, praise, thanksgiving, meditation, you come to them enveloped in an

atmosphere of God's Presence which gives to all of them an increasing reality. But *the very act itself,* the reception of God's influence, is the reception of what is divine, and what, on that account, your human thinking consciousness cannot possibly grasp.

It is a matter of perfect peace; no excitement, or straining, or striving, or contriving; and on the other hand no lazy dreaminess or hypnotic lethargy. Contemplation can often be reached by passing straight on from meditation. Some of the greatest writers on the subject have earnestly advised that as the best way of escaping the danger of mere dreaminess. You pause so long over a sentence or a thought suggested by what you are reading that the earthly language begins to fade as the brightness of His Presence grows. Meditation brings you into contact with Reality, and contemplation keeps you there. It is letting your soul stand in an attitude to receive God. It is knocking at the door, and waiting for God to open.

2. The second aspect of contemplation is inseparable from the first. Take the words in our Communion Office: "Here we offer and present unto Thee, O Lord, ourselves." Our mind can think about doing this; our will can

determine to do it; our feelings can enjoy the thought, and the determination. But *the very act itself*, the very offering and presenting, which takes place in silent contemplation, is the work of the Ego, the spirit, the whole Self, not differentiated into its several aspects, giving itself to God's Spirit. The Lord says, "Behold I stand at the door and knock." In contemplation we realize that He on His part is waiting for us to open; and we hear Him say, "Is thy heart right, as My heart is with thy heart?"

But what is this mutuality of receiving and offering, the method of which I have called Prayer of Union? There is only one word for it—Love. The method is not dreamy laziness, or anything quietistic or hypnotic; it is the give-and-take of Love. As St. Bernard puts it, it is "God loving Himself [by a love proceeding] from man."

XIX. FELLOWSHIP

IF it is truly this, it is not selfish, because all mankind is one, the instrument of the Self-expression of the personal Reality. The principle of representation, of "sympathy," of priesthood, comes into play here as in all other methods of prayer. Our Prayer of Union works towards the closer union of God with all mankind.

Some members of the Church have recently made the attempt to realize the true corporateness of prayer, by meeting together for the purpose, and joining in what has been called the Fellowship of Silence. It would be of untold value if the silence could sometimes be made an opportunity for united contemplation. There is no reason, in the nature of things, why the practice of public worship should not be extended to include all the three methods of prayer. A group of people unite in knocking at the door, and opening to God's knock. And if they really contemplate, really meet with God in the give-and-take of Love,

they are at the same time mutually pouring their influence into each other, and therefore drawing each other nearer to God. One word of warning is needed. When they first begin to try, and probably for some time, they will find the difficulty of escaping self-consciousness much greater than in solitude. But if they can overcome that by practice and habit, their souls will rise in unison to God.

Lastly, let it never be forgotten that, as in the case of intercession, spiritual communion has its necessary complement in sacramental communion, wherein, as a united whole, we offer ourselves to God in union with Christ's eternal Self-offering, and as a united whole receive His Life. It is the sacrament of the give-and-take of Love.

The Christian Church must continue to train itself in prayer, thereby drawing all men into the vortex of the Love of God, "till we all come in the unity of the Faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect Man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."

ON INTERCESSION

SOMETHING has been said on this subject in the preceding pages; but Intercession is a spiritual duty so important, and so little practiced or understood by large numbers of Christian people, that it will not be out of place to deal with it here a little more fully. Prayer for others—What does it involve? What are its limits? What are its gains? Many questions rise to our minds; and we must approach them by recalling one or two of the fundamental aspects of prayer in general. All prayer is a reaching out after the divine Reality which lies at the heart of our being, and at the heart of the world. It is a striving, pressing, feeling after oneness with God. But it has to be remembered that there are countless different degrees of oneness with God. Take an illustration from human life. You are at a meeting or conference, and some one gets up —a total stranger to you—and makes a speech, pressing some point with which you are in hearty agreement, or proving some point that

you did not see before, and making you agree with him. The speaker at once establishes a certain degree of oneness between himself and you. And any degree of oneness carries with it just that degree of admiration or respect. But suppose that you get to know him, and you find on closer acquaintance point after point on which you agree with him; you learn to admire his mind and character, and the feeling might deepen into devoted attachment, affection, love. Every stage in the process means reaching a greater degree of oneness. If that is applied to our relations with God, the process is the Christian life. Some who read this are in far closer oneness with God than others. It is not simply a question of avoiding wrong things and doing right ones; it is something much deeper and more wonderful. How, then, is it done? In order to find yourself in deeper and deeper oneness with your friend, to arrive at devoted affection and love, you obviously require frequent conversations, frequent contact, frequent listenings to what he has to say, frequent expressions of agreement and oneness, an absence of any nervous reserve in letting him see your admiration and attachment—not always in words, but always in feeling and sympathy—a steady growing and intensifying of mutual

intimacy. And towards God all that increase in approach and intimacy is reached by prayer.

Here we have to do only with petitions for other people. What part will they play in our growing oneness with God? When we ask for something, and get exactly what we want, it is very nice and satisfying. And it happens very often, as all the saints of God can tell you. If free spirit, the spirit of man, can to some extent control the forces of Nature and adapt them to his purposes, can we say less of the Spirit of God? If man can do many things, consciously and with purpose, in answer to petitions, can God do less? The difficulty seems to begin when we ask for something and do *not* get it. We must remember that God has His purposes, not only for our little individual lives, but great and untraceable purposes for the human race as a whole. Some of those purposes He cannot fulfill without our co-operation, because we possess the extraordinary power of voluntary choice, a will which is able to help or hinder Him. Every time we offer Him a genuine prayer, what is the effect? We do not force or persuade Him to give us what we ask for. But we get into touch with His power. His power is there, ready to be used, and in those things in which He needs our co-

operation we voluntarily set it in motion, so to speak. Very often we cannot see in what direction our prayer has its effect; we can only feel sure that we are contributing something towards making the divine energy active and fruitful. As regards our immediate request His answer to our prayer may be the answer, No; but every prayer does something towards the fulfillment of the world-wide purposes of God; somehow, somewhere, we are making a difference in the life of mankind. It needs a very broad outlook and a very earnest desire for God's glory to make us go on praying when we do not appear to be answered.

But we can always comfort ourselves, not only by sheer faith that we are accomplishing something in the world, but by pointing to two definite effects of which we can be quite certain. On the one hand, by asking for *anything* in humble and loving dependence, we can express our relationship of children to a Father. That is to say, our intercessions for those who are known and dear to us, or known and not dear, or not known at all, quite apart from their results to us or them, are an offering to God; every true prayer that we breathe is a translation into words or thoughts of the inarticulate language of love, and has the same effect as

would be reached if we were able to go on and on saying with real earnestness and meaning the two words, "our Father." If more of His children could only realize that they can throw themselves into prayer—on any subject, at any time or place, in any attitude, with any words or no words—*for His delight,* He would get so much more from them than He does. On the other hand, nothing that we can do to give Him delight fails to react upon ourselves. To be in touch with His power by any sort of petition contributes to our own spiritual growth. If people live for some time in a foreign country they not only learn the language and catch the accent, but gradually change to some extent in manner and habits and even in appearance, and become like those around them. And if your heart travels frequently to the Presence of God, and you talk with Him, you will gradually be transformed into the same Image. The one thing you want to get and keep is contact, to be naturally and easily in touch.

Let us now look more particularly at our prayers for other people. Our requests for our own personal needs so easily slide into selfishness or self-centeredness, or self-pity, that to pray for others is a safer and surer method of putting ourselves in tune with the

great love of God. And to be in tune with His love means the same as to be in touch with His power. God is love, and any expression of our love in intercession is, by its very nature, coöperation with Him. We are contributing to the world-wide forward movement towards the satisfying of His love. When we come to look at the matter closely most of us find that what makes our intercessions so feeble and lifeless is chiefly that we have not reached that love and longing for the souls of men which can put us really into tune with the love of God. Our love and longing are not to be simply the natural affection that we feel for those nearest and dearest to us. We can easily be moved to utter fervent petitions for them when any special need arises. The love that is most akin to God's love, and which therefore does the most work, is the love for human souls as such; the longing that that which is made in His Image may grow nearer to His fullness. That kind of love, while it naturally comes easiest for our family and close friends, can be extended in genuine reality to reach out to all men.

And that thought, in turn, can afford us a welcome relief from a difficulty felt by many which has already been referred to in Chapter

XII. Imagine the millions upon millions of things that we should have to pray about if we started praying for all the needs of the world. How are we to pick and choose? And how many things ought we to pray for? I have met some people who were anxious to pray well, and were really burdened by the feeling of the vast number of petitions that they ought to offer but cannot for want of time. What are we to do? Well, one thing is quite clear, that only God can know the individual needs of every one, and therefore if the value of our prayers depended upon our knowledge of individual needs, there are millions of human beings who would never be prayed for at all, and unnumbered millions of things that human beings need, but of which no praying person knew anything. The working out of God's purposes is dependent on our coöperation, but not on our knowledge. What we have to do is to love the souls of men so truly that we really and deeply desire the fulfillment of God's purposes for every one of them. And if we could abide permanently in that state of desire, we should have no need to offer any detailed petitions at all. God knoweth what every one in the world hath need of before we ask Him. He does not require us to give Him

information on the subject. It is not knowledge that is wanted; it is the conscious, voluntary state of desire; it is the being in tune with His love, and therefore in touch with His power. But because our minds are unable to abide consciously more than a very short time in that condition, we find it a help to resort to details; they are specimens, tangible points, handles by which the mind keeps its hold on the universal desire. And I am sure that we ought, in our self-training, to practice the large desire, and try to make it play a much bigger part in our prayers than it usually does, and only turn for help to details from time to time when the mind needs them. That is exactly what we have in our Lord's pattern prayer. It is not simply words to be said, it is a summing up of the whole method and program of our petitions. First He illustrates in three different ways the great universal desire for the working out of God's purposes in the souls and bodies of men: "Hallowed be Thy Name"; "Thy Kingdom come"; "Thy Will be done." And then He gives four specimens of detailed petitions that we can use as helps: "Give us this day our daily bread"; "Forgive us our trespasses"; "Lead us not into temptation"; "Deliver us from evil." All four are

intercessions because the words "us" and "our" include all mankind—at least they ought to if we practice the kind of prayer of which the Lord's prayer is an example and guide. They add literally nothing to the threefold universal petition which precedes them, in fact they do not nearly cover it; they are a wise and merciful concession to the limitations of the human mind, and show us that we are justified in mentioning details in our intercessions provided they are kept in their proper place. To pray well is not the same as to pray regularly, or often, or carefully, or beautifully, or diligently. It is to desire continuously—"without ceasing," as St. Paul says—that the desire of God may be achieved.

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